

Current Testimony in Opposition to SB – 314

I J.D. Lindeberg, PE, and my company Resource Recycling Systems Inc., remain emphatically opposed to the "Grass to Gas" legislation. I'd like to add a few comments to the testimony that I provided in front of this committee in 2010 and later in 2012.

We absolutely must require all landfills to implement methane gas collection. Regardless of its technical efficiency, any gas that is collected reduces the pollution coming from these receptacles of solid waste. Therefore we encourage any effort to regulate the dirty and unproductive landfill industry. Yardwaste landfill bans help even the playing field between the landfills who have the support of the state and composting sites who do not have that same support. Note that the Michigan Waste Industries Alliance is not supporting this legislation.

We strongly believe that organics recovery is important for the health of our state, the fertility of our soils, and as support of all of those large companies who work in Michigan that depend on a effective composting infrastructure. As you will hear from BASF, Scotts, and other large employers in the state, emerging business best practices encouraging the recovery of organics of all types create jobs, economic activity and reduce dependence on landfilling, an industry whose use should be the last option.

Please help Michigan move forward toward leadership in the 21st Century by supporting a strong organics recovery industry. You can best do this

2010 Testimony in Opposition to SB – 314 (previously given testimony)

Let's not overturn the yard waste ban. Make no mistake about it, if this "exemption" legislation is passed, yard waste landfill ban will be effectively over turned. So, who am I? I am JD Lindeberg, a registered engineer in the State of Michigan. I am President of the firm Resource Recycling Systems. At RRS we have worked successfully for 25 years to recover resources from the waste stream. We are proud to call a number of the composters in the audience our clients and our friends.

Global Climate Change

I agree 100% that our landfills should collect as much methane as possible. The technology is available and in most cases the already implemented. There is no need to stimulate this more gas collection by putting another industry out of business and causing an additional 1,000 people to lose their jobs.

Why is methane such a problem? Let's assume that one way or another the YW will decompose. Either it will become carbon dioxide in a composting process or it will become methane in a landfill. For each carbon atom it can either join with an O₂ molecule and make CO₂ or it can join with two H₂ molecules and become CH₄. The only problem is that when it becomes methane its effect on global climate change is 24 times worse than if it had simply become CO₂.

The proponents of this bill brag that their new "high tech" landfills will recover 70% of the generated methane. They say that doesn't mean that the other 30% goes to the atmosphere. Let's look at those assumptions. They are based on the fairly heroic assumption by the USEPA that a well performing landfill gas recovery system can recovery 70%. How did they pick that number? Well, because know one actually knows, they had to make an assumption. So they use it in their models and calculated VERY carefully how much methane will eventually make it to the atmosphere. You know in my business, they have a term for that – GIGO – Garbage In Garbage Out. I guess that has a double meaning here!

So, when I do the math, with a 25:1 hole to dig out, my calculations show that a landfill will need to recover 95% of the methane generated just to break even with composting on a global climate change gas profile basis. Sure, the extra trips down the street create some more carbon emissions than a single pass would if all the material were going to a landfill. But it doesn't come anywhere near the 30% that is going to be lost from the system in their model. In fact, the number we use is between 5 – 10% of the total methane production in a landfill.

LfG as an Energy Source

It's great that utilities like LP&L buy Granger's recovered landfill gas. You should note that they are already doing this and have indicated that they will continue to do so – WITHOUT THIS LEGISLATION. Using the State's own numbers only 0.5 – 1.0% of the total demand for energy will be served by LfG in the event that this legislation is passed. In fact much of this improvement would simply come from collecting the gas that is currently produced and using that. If you read the Public Policy report carefully you will see that the overall impact of the additional yard waste is really quite small – tenths of one percent. Sure, every little bit of green energy helps, but keep in mind that landfill gas (only part of which is methane) is really very dirty and harmful to people. Let's also remind ourselves that the argument that the public prefers green energy to compost is a logically inconsistent leap. No one goes to the store and says "let's see, I'm going to spend \$100 today and I need to choose between green power and compost." Frankly, that's like saying that the public prefers Montmorency Cherries to KleenEx.

Jobs

Others can talk more eloquently on a personal level about this subject than I can. But remember, economic development studies have shown that for every one job created by landfilling, composting creates four. Next I will respond to the claim that "this will not put the composters out of business".

Last night I did a little bit of work to evaluate which landfills this would effect and how much of Michigan's waste they currently accept. What I found was startling. Let's think about it this way. We have about 49 landfills in this state that accept what we think of as garbage – Type II waste. The actual waste flows are concentrated in a few landfills. One, the largest in Michigan (Pine Tree Acres in McComb), gets 14% of the waste disposed in Michigan by itself. Overall the 13 largest landfills get more than two thirds of the waste disposed in this state. THEY ARE ALL ELIGIBLE AND READY TO ACT ON THIS EXEMPTION THE MOMENT IT IS PASSED. These landfills are fairly evenly spread across the state's major centers of population. Detroit, Oakland County, McComb County, Ann Arbor, Lansing, Kalamazoo/Battle Creek, Grand Rapids/Holland, and Traverse City will all be covered. Not so coincidentally these are the same areas where the state's small business composters are also located.

There will be no place in the state where the landfill industry can't undercut the composting industry at will and put them out of business.

Policy Considerations

The proponents of HB 5334 suggest that the existence of a healthy compost industry in states that don't have a landfill ban like California suggests that one isn't needed. What they fail to mention is that California and the other states like it have very aggressive and regulation mandated (those local units that fail to meet standards are fined) recovery goals. California's focuses on Zero Waste – which is really a set of ever increasing recovery targets that must be met with an aggressive composting program as

well as many other recovery methods. In other words they use sharper policy tools that create a healthy composting industry without need for a ban. There is also plenty of demand for the compost product!

In our state we are seeing the economic fruits of a healthy compost infrastructure – one that won't be there if this bill passes. Universities, hospitals, and other producers of food waste are recovering their organics by sending them to composting facilities. Their customers do not find the notion of "let's send food waste to a landfill for gas recovery" acceptable. Landfills are not now and never will be a green.

Conclusion

HB 5334 supporters say they need this to create green energy. In fact they don't. They are already doing it and they don't need more money to justify the investment. They just want more money – who can fault them for trying? What will this really do for the energy independence of this state? Not that much. Is this good for the climate? No it's not essential and it will worsen the situation with climate change gasses. Please, let's not kid ourselves about a consensus, because there isn't a consensus on this issue. There are many of us who very loudly disagree with the intent of this bill. Instead, let's do something that looks forward. Let's support the composting industry in this state and promote jobs and small business so we can take the lead in something other than unemployment and bankrupt companies. We can keep this money in the State by supporting these hardworking men and women in the audience. Passing this bill will take a very large portion of the new tipfees to Wall Street. Who does that help? Not us! Thanks for your time. I look forward to your questions.